

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510 - 3505

July 2, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:


Record rains across Ohio this spring have resulted in late plantings, unplanted acres, and significant uncertainty for farmers across the state. Last month at a hearing in the Senate Agriculture Committee, I urged USDA officials to use the flexibility provided by Congress to aid farmers in Ohio that had been unable to plant their crops. Unfortunately, in the nearly three weeks since that hearing, the need for action by USDA has only increased. In fact, fields have remained wet and many Ohio farmers have significantly reduced their planting, or abandoned this year's crop entirely. As such, I again urge the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to use the agency's congressionally-provided flexibility to ensure that Ohio farmers dealing with excessive moisture have all available USDA resources, including disaster aid, at their disposal.

As you know, portions of the Midwest, including Ohio, have seen well above average rainfall this spring. Due to hurricanes and significant snowfall, the National Weather Service found that out of 124 years of data collection the 12-month period ending in April of this year was the wettest in the continental United States. These rain events have contributed to flooded fields, record high water levels in Lake Erie, and overwhelmed field tiling systems. Last week, only 80% of the corn crop and 65% of the soybean crop had been planted. Both of these are well below the 5-year average of 100% for that week, according to USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). More Crops are in the ground this week, but planting has not been spread evenly across all counties. These planting delays and abandoned crops not only harm those for whom farming is their livelihood, but the market effects of unplanted acres in Ohio and across the Midwest could have significant consequences for livestock, rural communities, and consumers.

While I appreciate USDA's decision to provide haying and grazing flexibility to farmers that planted cover crops, more must be done. I believe that the Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Act of 2019 (P.L. 116-20) provides the Department with the flexibility necessary to determine that the definition of "flooding" covers excess moisture in farm fields. Rivers, streams, and creeks across Ohio are at high levels, which has exacerbated flooding, ponding, saturated soils, and, as a result, will likely result in significant acreage going unplanted. While many Ohio farmers participate in the Federal Crop Insurance Program, by acknowledging that excess moisture is tantamount to flooding, these farmers will know that the federal farm safety net is working the way it should.

I appreciate the hard work of Farm Service Agency and Natural Resource Conservation Service field staff during this uncertain time and look forward to working with you on behalf of Ohio farmers.

Sincerely,


Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

cc: The Honorable Bill Northey, Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation